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Members of the Dawida Biodiversity Conservation Organization conducting common bird monitoring in Taita Hills. PHOTO BY GILBAY OBUNGA

Coping with the new normal

We have reluctantly changed our way of life. Masks are normal. Physical distancing is a must. Public transport is different. A cough or a sneeze is viewed differently. Gatherings are being re-assessed. This new normal is not just going away. Kenya's Covid-19 situation is worsening. The world over, virtual meetings—zoom, skype, teams – have stepped in the place for physical meetings.

Like others, Nature Kenya is adapting. Some activities remain postponed, others that had been postponed may be possible within new approaches while other work continues as follows:

1. The 110th Annual General Meeting will take place by zoom on 19th August 2020 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. See separate announcement and link to the meeting.
2. Members will receive an electronic version of the Nature Net until further notice
3. Some museums and sites are expected to re-open soon. All visitors will observe new access protocols including sanitatising and wearing masks.
4. The Wednesday Morning Birdwalks have been postponed further, probably until September. There may be changes to the format. Updates will be published in the September Nature net.
5. Sunday bird walks and other field trips and talks remain suspended until further notice. You will be informed as soon as they resume.
6. The *'Lungs for Kenya'* Charity Golf Tournament 2020 is re-scheduled for Friday, October 2nd, 2020 at the Karen Country Club.
7. The Membership office and shop is closed until further notice. Membership recruitment and renewal however continues. Visit http://naturekenya.org/support/membership/ and use cashless payment options such as M-Pesa or credit/debit cards. Your membership cards will be processed and mailed to you.
8. As long as the main office remains open part of the time, members may also buy Arabuko-Sokoke honey. Pay by M-pesa and arrange a time to collect the honey. Ring the bell at the entrance of the office behind the galleries.

Staff have continued to optionally work from home. Support staff are on paid leave. On site conservation actions by field staff and Site Support Groups across 26 sites has continued despite the Covid-19 disruptions:

RESTORATION

In South Nandi forest, 32,000 indigenous tree seedlings were planted by Kimondi Community Forest Association. Along river Nzoia in Yala, 22,972 indigenous tree seedlings were planted on lower River Yala Riparian zone while 20,480 trees were planted on community farms. Around Mt. Kenya, 37,888 trees were planted at degraded sites; the Ngaya CFA planted 5,000 trees to replace dead seedlings planted in October and November 2019; monitoring and verification of all restoration sites planted (110ha) and maintained (370ha) was completed by field staff; and two Restoration Action Plans for Chuka and Kiera CFAs were drafted.

SAVING SPECIES

Site Support Groups continued to undertake community-led detailed IBA monitoring: Friends of Dunga conducted bird monitoring around the flooded Hippo Point; Maasai Mara Wildlife Ambassadors carried out vulture monitoring at Naboisho Conservancy to mark World Environment Day; Arabuko-Sokoke

Contd. next page

VIRTUAL 110TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

DATE: Wednesday 19th August 2020
TIME: 10:00 AM - Noon
VIA: Zoom virtual meeting

The AGM was originally scheduled for May 6th 2020, but postponed in view of the coronavirus situation. To ensure that we have an AGM, we have now shifted to a virtual meeting. We invite you, as a member, to attend the virtual AGM that will be run using Zoom. We look forward to "meeting" you there!

The Agenda

1. Minutes of the 109th Annual General Meeting
2. Matters arising from the Minutes
3. Chairman's Report
4. Honorary Treasurer's Report
5. Appointment of Auditor
6. Any other business of which due notice has been given
7. Election of Office Bearers, Members of the Executive Committee and Trustees.

To register for the virtual AGM in advance, please click here.

The AGM documents will be ready for viewing in August for those who register.

How to access the virtual AGM
You will receive the virtual AGM (Zoom) link in your registration confirmation email.

What you need on your computer or device to attend the virtual AGM

Zoom application

- Download and install the Zoom application appropriate for your device.

System requirements
You may join the meeting from your PC, Mac, Linux or mobile devices (IOS or Android). Click here to learn about:

- Supported operating systems, tablets and mobile devices
- Supported browsers
- Required device processor and RAM

Internet connectivity

- Join a Zoom test meeting to test your Internet connectivity.
- Check here for recommended Internet bandwidth.

Sound

- You will need speakers or headphones to listen to the speaker. Check that your headphones or speakers are connected and the volume is turned on (where applicable).
- You may also need to check the Audio Settings on Zoom once you have logged in.

Contd. from page 1

Forest Adjacent Dwellers Association (ASFADA) conducted forest patrols in Arabuko-Sokoke forest; Sabaki River Conservation Development Organization (SARICODO) conducted IBA monitoring at the Sabaki River mouth and recorded mangrove destruction; detailed monitoring of Clarke's Weaver and Taita Apalis took place in Dakatcha Woodland and Taita Hills, respectively; and 20 transects were surveyed for Common Bird Monitoring in Arabuko Sokoke Forest. Draft Kenya Vulture Safe Zone designation guidelines were developed; 20 SSGs conducted rapid assessments and common bird monitoring at their IBAs and awareness creation to the local community members on the Covid-19 pandemic; and proposals to be submitted to the Save Our Species (SoS) call for proposals drafted by the Species and Sites Manager (Paul Gacheru).

POLICY AND ADVOCACY Nature Kenya provided input into key policy processes including: budget tips to the Cabinet Secretary, National Treasury and Planning, for consideration while preparing the financial year 2020/21 budget statement; Kenya Development Bank bill 2020; Nakuru County Budget estimates for 2020/2021 financial year; and Nairobi National Park (NNP) Draft Management Plan 2020-2030 – new version. Dr Paul Matiku joined eminent personalities in a webinar discussing World Environment Day.

LOCAL EMPOWERMENT

Fifteen SSGs participated in World Environment Day celebrations in June 2020; Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group (YESSG), Yala Planning Advisory Committee and Nature Kenya staff carried out awareness on the Yala Swamp land use plan and its implementation through a live radio talk show on Bulala FM with a session every week. In conservation farming and climate smart agriculture in Yala, 366kg of assorted vegetables was harvested, and a fish and chicken feed processing machine installed with electricity. To help SSGs cope with the Covid-19 pandemic, the Local Empowerment Manager (Joel Siele) initiated the development of a proposal to be submitted to the BIOPAMA Rapid Response Grant.

MOVING FORWARD

Nature Kenya will continue to update you on further developments. Threats remain to species and habitats, and conservation work must go on. Please continue to support Nature Kenya, and to observe and enjoy nature from wherever you are. For any clarification or to report your observation on species and sites, kindly contact us through e-mail: **office@naturekenya.org** or telephone: **020 3537568, 0780 149200, 0751 624312, 0771 343138**

Dr. Paul Matiku,
Executive Director, Nature Kenya – the East Africa Natural History Society

Improving livelihoods in the Yala Ecosystem through chicken farming

BY ESTHER WANGARI

You are likely to find indigenous chicken or *Kuku Kienyeji* on almost all menus in the eateries you visit. Many years of research and improvements on indigenous chicken breeds have made them one of Kenya's most sought-after delicacies and rearing them a popular business undertaking. Improved local chicken breed possesses characteristics like their ability to thrive in different weather conditions, resistance to diseases, and improved growth rates, which allows it to favorably compete with exotic breeds.

The latest entrant into the chicken rearing business is a group of 50 women from Rawalo Village in Gem sub-county, Siaya County. This follows the operationalization of the poultry production unit constructed by Nature Kenya, with funding from the Darwin Initiative, through the Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group. The unit has a capacity of rearing 600 chickens. The three main functions of the unit will be incubation of chicks, rearing of chickens, and collection of eggs for sale. Brooder equipment including feeders and drinkers have been procured and 150 improved kienyeji chicks; 100 White Leghorn and 50 Kuroiler chicks delivered to kick-start the project.

"The first batch of chicks will be reared up to two months before being distributed to beneficiary farmers. Eggs produced by layers will be sold either for consumption or to local farmers for hatching to improve local breeds," explains Emily Mateche, Nature Kenya's Project Officer based in Siaya.

Nature Kenya has been at the forefront of initiating, developing, and diversifying sustainable nature-based enterprises in partnerships with local communities in Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The aim of such initiatives is to improve community livelihoods and support local conservation activities of the sites. These enterprises also provide alternatives to unsustainable livelihood options detrimental to the IBAs and have helped reduce overdependence on nature products for livelihoods. Nature Kenya has successfully implemented similar ventures in Dakatcha Woodland and in Tana Delta.

"Our main objectives for establishing the chicken rearing business is to improve the household diet and income for the members of the local community. We also want to give women an alternative livelihood source to ease their reliance on natural resources to make a living," says Emily.

Beneficiaries sharing experiences on use of earthen brooder heaters at the poultry production unit at Rawalo village.
PHOTO: EMILY MATECHE

To manage the chicken business, the chicken farmers have constituted a Chicken Business Sub-committee whose role is to develop internal business targets for the chicken rearing enterprise and to ensure continuous production of high quality and quantity at all times. Part of the committee's responsibility will be to mobilize beneficiary chicken farmers to attend training and follow up to ensure skills acquired are shared with other farmers within the community and effectively utilized to enhance productivity in chicken farming.

The unit will also act as a marketing center for chicks, mature chicken and eggs. They will also negotiate for good prices in liaison with Upper Yala Site Support Group, Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group, and other partners including Nature Kenya. Value addition of products through the provision of services such as slaughtering, packaging, and sale of assorted chicken parts to butcheries or mini-markets will also be done by the unit. The beneficiaries have been linked to fish feed producers in Usenge town who will supply poultry feed at a subsidized cost. The fish and poultry feed making machine was procured with support from Nature Kenya and has helped fish farmers in Yala to minimize the cost of their fish production project.

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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Time for Restoring Nature: World Environment Day and World Oceans Day in summary

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has pushed the world into a global health crisis that has left us re-evaluating our relationship with nature. The food we eat, the water we drink, and the air we breathe come from nature. We depend on nature for survival. The United Nations warms that it would take 1.6 Earths to meet the demands that humans make of nature each year. Human actions such as deforestation, encroachment on wildlife habitats, intensified agriculture, and acceleration of climate change have increased pressure on nature, leading to a decline in its health and productivity, and the emergence of new diseases.

This year's World Environment Day and World Oceans Day offered an opportunity for policymakers and individuals alike to reflect on ways to adjust the course of humanity's demand for natural resources to avert future health and environmental crises. Marked on June 5 every year, the World Environment Day 2020 was themed *"Celebrating Biodiversity"* with the aim of appreciating nature through activities such as tree planting, environmental awareness creation and clean-up exercises.

In Kilifi County, the Mida Creek Conservation and Awareness Group marked the day by planting 200 mangrove seedlings in the Mida Creek area. The day would not be complete without a bird walk along the shores of the Indian Ocean; participants sighted 32 bird species.

The Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group hosted members of the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya for an early morning bird-walk at Hell's Kitchen where they sighted the Red-and-yellow Barbet among other bird species. They also planted 100 indigenous tree seedlings, which included *Mbamba-kofi* and *Mpingo*. In Tana River, Tana Delta Conservation Network together with members of Minjila Dispensary committee planted 150 trees at the Minjila Dispensary compound.

In Kisumu County, Friends of Dunga Site Support Group organised a bird walk and a total of 50 bird species were sighted. Radio Lake Victoria and Radio Manene, through their breakfast and evening shows respectively, offered a platform for members of the Friends of Dunga SSG to create awareness about the World Environment Day and the importance of conservation in the Dholuo language.

Mara Wildlife Ambassadors marked the World Environment Day by conducting a vulture monitoring exercise in the Naboisho Conservancy in the Maasai Mara Ecosystem. The group has recently intensified patrols in the Maasai Mara to check for incidents of human wildlife conflict which pose a threat to the survival of vultures in the area.

Along the coastline, members of the Sabaki River Conservation Development Organisation together with local police teamed up to clean up Sabaki Bridge where a total of 50kg of plastic waste was collected. The clean-up exercise was extended through to the World Oceans Day, where they participated in cleaning up the Sabaki Estuary. Sabaki Estuary marks the point where River Athi-Galana-Sabaki empties into the Indian Ocean. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has identified plastic waste as a key ocean pollutant. It is estimated that 8 million tonnes of plastic are dumped in the ocean each year, with rivers the biggest channels which ferry the plastic from cities to the oceans.

Five planets across the sky

BY FLEUR NG'WENO

This month all five planets that can be seen with the unaided eye are in the pre-dawn sky. Jupiter and Saturn are in the sky all night, rising in the east as the sun sets in the west. As the Earth rotates towards the east, the planets and the stars seem to move across the sky towards the west. Mars, glowing brighter and redder, rises near midnight and is high overhead at dawn. Brilliant Venus is in the east before dawn.

Little Mercury joins the other planets early in July, low over the sunrise. The moon is near Jupiter and Saturn on July 6 and August 1 and 2. It is near Mars on July 11 and 12. As a waning crescent, the moon is near Venus on July 17 and near Mercury on the 19th before dawn.

July Stars

Spica, a bright blue-white star, is high overhead in the evening. Below Spica in the south there are two brilliant stars, Alpha and Beta Centauri in the constellation of the Centaur. Alpha Centauri, the brightest, is actually composed of three stars. Two of these stars, Alpha Centauri A and Alpha Centauri B, are very close to each other; to us they appear as one. The third star in Alpha Centauri, a small, red star called Proxima Centauri, is 4.22 light years away – the nearest star to our sun.

North of Spica is the bright, orange star Arcturus, at the tip of a kite-shaped constellation, or star pattern, that the ancient Greeks called Boötes the Herdsman. Below Arcturus in the north, is the Plough or Big Dipper – a line of three stars above a box formed by four stars.

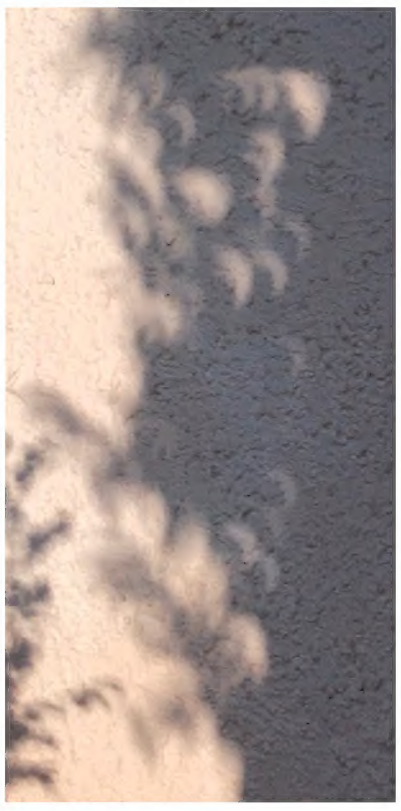
East of Spica is Antares, the fiery red eye of the constellation of Scorpius the Scorpion. West of Antares, three bright stars form the scorpion's claws. South of Antares, a line of stars forms the scorpion's body, like a giant fishhook. Two stars close together are the sting in the scorpion's tail. The moon is near Antares on July 2 and 29.

Low in the western sky, the constellation of Leo the Lion is setting; in the southwest, the Southern Cross is tilting towards the west. The slender, waxing crescent moon is near Regulus in Leo on July 22 and near Spica on the 26th.

Moon, July '20

Full moon, July 5; last quarter, July 12; new moon, July 20; first quarter, July 27.

The partial solar eclipse in June was captured through the clouds.
PHOTO BY TEDDY KINYANJUI



And as seen when the spots of light among the shadow of the leaves turned into crescents.
PHOTO BY AMOLO NG'WENO

Birding Updates

The Wednesday Morning Birdwalks, monthly Sunday Birdwatch and Mombasa birdwalks are still temporarily suspended. The Wednesday Morning Birdwalks may restart in September with a few changes. Updates in upcoming newsletters.

Fortunately, birds – and bird watchers – are found throughout Kenya. We hope you find opportunities to go birding, on your own or with local groups. If you go out birding, please submit lists of the birds that you see/hear to the Kenya Bird Map project to help document the distribution of Kenya's birds <http://kenya.birdmap.africa/> If you have questions, write to <kenyabirdmap@naturekenya.org>

To stay in touch and be updated with the birding scene in Kenya, sign in to the new Kenyabirdsnet platform of Google Groups at: https://groups.google.com/d/forum/kenyabirdsnet After signing in you will be able to post your records through the following email address: kenyabirdsnet@googlegroups.com

Some online resources about birds and birding are:

- Wings Over Kenya Facebook page
- Ndege Wetu (14-part blog series on the birds of Kenya) <http://www.shotsbyshema.com/category/ndege-wetu/)
- BirdLife International < http://www.birdlife.org>
- The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology Bird Academy <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org> Many of their resources are free to use.

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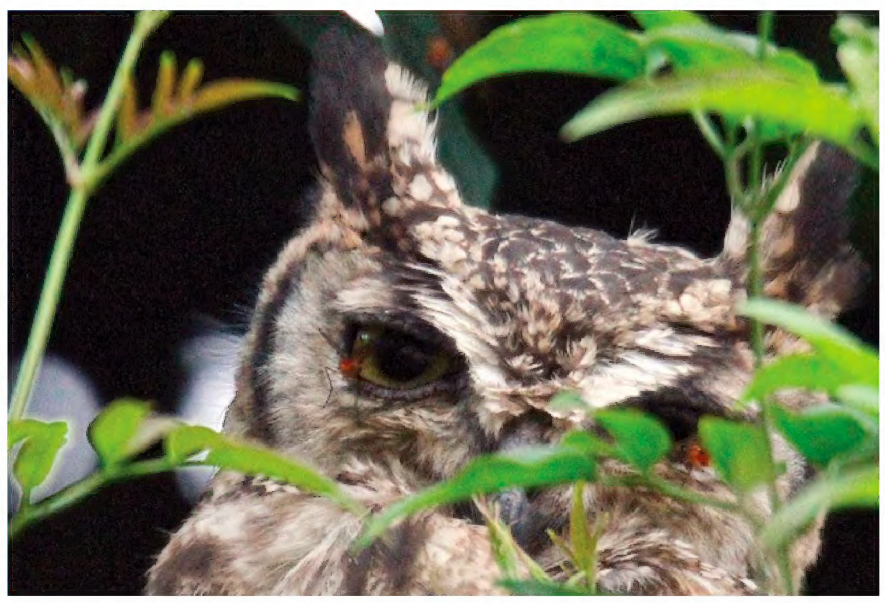
Butterflies of Loresho by Peter Usher

Fly in the Eye



You will see two small red insects in the eyes of this Spotted Eagle Owl, photographed by Peter Usher. It sat all morning with its eyes wide open, apparently not blinking. Dino Martins says: The insects are flies. A number of flies and moths too will feed from bird or mammal eyes. This behaviour is known as lachryphagy.

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For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org